

H. G. Wells

For other uses, see [H. G. Wells \(disambiguation\)](#).

Herbert George Wells (21 September 1866 – 13 August 1946) — known as **H. G. Wells**^{[3][4]} — was a prolific English writer in many genres, including the novel, history, politics, and social commentary, and textbooks and rules for war games. Wells is now best remembered for his [science fiction](#) novels, and is called the father of science fiction, along with [Jules Verne](#) and [Hugo Gernsback](#).^{[5][6][lower-alpha 1]} His most notable science fiction works include *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898). He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature four times.^[7]

Wells's earliest specialized training was in [biology](#), and his thinking on ethical matters took place in a specifically and fundamentally [Darwinian](#) context.^[8] He was also from an early date an outspoken socialist, often (but not always, as at the beginning of the [First World War](#)) sympathising with [pacifist](#) views. His later works became increasingly political and [didactic](#), and he wrote little science fiction, while he sometimes indicated on official documents that his profession was that of [journalist](#).^[9] Novels like *Kipps* and *The History of Mr Polly*, which describe lower-middle-class life, led to the suggestion, when they were published, that he was a worthy successor to [Charles Dickens](#),^[10] but Wells described a range of social strata and even attempted, in *Tono-Bungay* (1909), a diagnosis of [English society](#) as a whole. A diabetic, in 1934 Wells co-founded the charity The Diabetic Association (known today as [Diabetes UK](#)).

1 Life

1.1 Early life

Herbert George Wells was born at Atlas House, 46 High Street, [Bromley](#), in [Kent](#),^[11] on 21 September 1866.^[4] Called "Bertie" in the family, he was the fourth and last child of [Joseph Wells](#) (a former domestic gardener, and at the time a shopkeeper and professional [cricketer](#)) and his wife, Sarah Neal (a former [domestic servant](#)). An inheritance had allowed the family to acquire a shop in which they sold china and sporting goods, although it failed to prosper: the stock was old and worn out, and the location was poor. Joseph Wells managed to earn a meagre income, but little of it came from the shop and he received an unsteady amount of money from playing [professional](#)

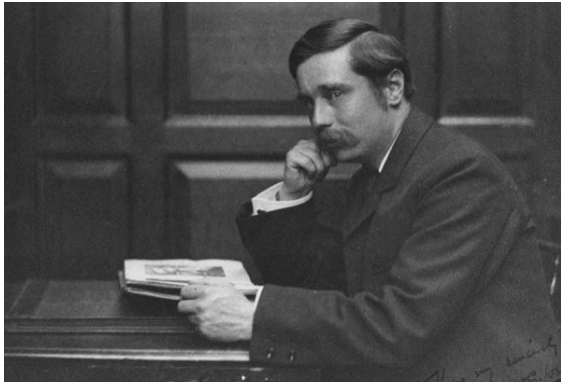
[cricket](#) for the [Kent county team](#).^[12] Payment for skilled bowlers and batsmen came from voluntary donations afterwards, or from small payments from the clubs where matches were played.

A defining incident of young Wells's life was an accident in 1874 that left him bedridden with a broken leg.^[4] To pass the time he started reading books from the local library, brought to him by his father. He soon became devoted to the other worlds and lives to which books gave him access; they also stimulated his desire to write. Later that year he entered Thomas Morley's Commercial Academy, a [private school](#) founded in 1849 following the bankruptcy of Morley's earlier school. The teaching was erratic, the curriculum mostly focused, Wells later said, on producing [copperplate handwriting](#) and doing the sort of sums useful to tradesmen. Wells continued at Morley's Academy until 1880. In 1877, his father, Joseph Wells, fractured his thigh. The accident effectively put an end to Joseph's career as a cricketer, and his subsequent earnings as a shopkeeper were not enough to compensate for the loss of the primary source of family income.

No longer able to support themselves financially, the family instead sought to place their sons as [apprentices](#) in various occupations. From 1880 to 1883, Wells had an unhappy apprenticeship as a [draper](#) at the [Southsea](#) Drapery Emporium, Hyde's.^[13] His experiences at Hyde's, where he worked a thirteen-hour day and slept in a dormitory with other apprentices,^[11] later inspired his novels *The Wheels of Chance* and *Kipps*,^[14] which portray the life of a draper's apprentice as well as providing a critique of society's distribution of wealth.

Wells's parents had a turbulent marriage, owing primarily to his mother being a [Protestant](#) and his father a [freethinker](#). When his mother returned to work as a lady's maid (at [Uppark](#), a [country house](#) in [Sussex](#)), one of the conditions of work was that she would not be permitted to have living space for her husband and children. Thereafter, she and Joseph lived separate lives, though they never divorced and remained faithful to each other. As a consequence, Herbert's personal troubles increased as he subsequently failed as a draper and also, later, as a chemist's assistant. Fortunately for Herbert, Uppark had a magnificent library in which he immersed himself, reading many classic works, including [Plato's Republic](#), and [More's Utopia](#). This would be the beginning of Herbert George Wells's venture into literature.

1.2 Teacher

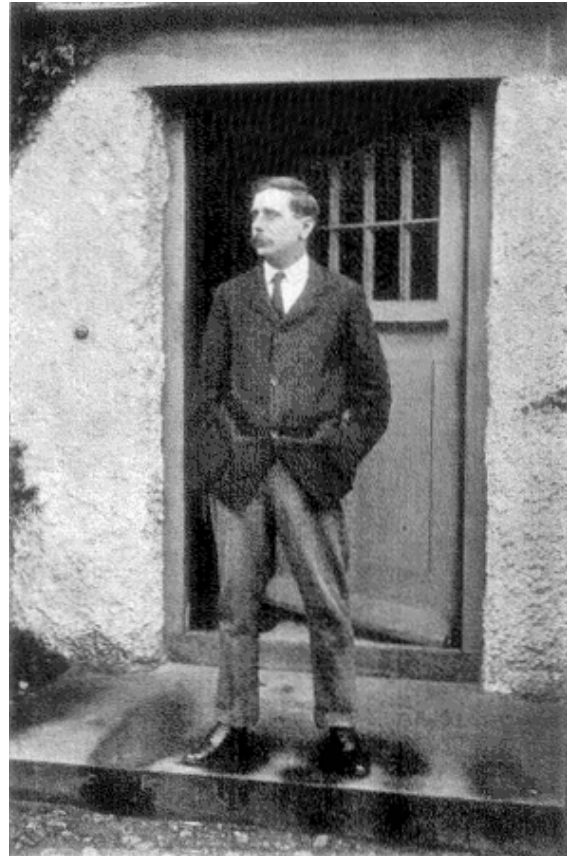


H. G. Wells studying in London, taken circa 1890

In October 1879 Wells's mother arranged through a distant relative, Arthur Williams, for him to join the **National School at Wookey** in Somerset as a pupil-teacher, a senior pupil who acted as a teacher of younger children.^[13] In December that year, however, Williams was dismissed for irregularities in his qualifications and Wells was returned to Uppark. After a short apprenticeship at a chemist in nearby **Midhurst**, and an even shorter stay as a boarder at **Midhurst Grammar School**, he signed his apprenticeship papers at Hyde's. In 1883 Wells persuaded his parents to release him from the apprenticeship, taking an opportunity offered by Midhurst Grammar School again to become a pupil-teacher; his proficiency in Latin and science during his previous, short stay had been remembered.^{[12][13]}

The years he spent in Southsea had been the most miserable of his life to that point, but his good fortune at securing a position at Midhurst Grammar School meant that Wells could continue his self-education in earnest.^[12] The following year, Wells won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science (later the **Royal College of Science** in **South Kensington**, now part of **Imperial College London**) in London, studying **biology** under **Thomas Henry Huxley**. As an alumnus, he later helped to set up the Royal College of Science Association, of which he became the first president in 1909. Wells studied in his new school until 1887 with a weekly allowance of 21 **shillings** (a **guinea**) thanks to his scholarship. This ought to have been a comfortable sum of money (at the time many **working class** families had "round about a pound a week" as their entire household income)^[15] yet in his *Experiment in Autobiography*, Wells speaks of constantly being hungry, and indeed, photographs of him at the time show a youth who is very thin and malnourished.

He soon entered the Debating Society of the school. These years mark the beginning of his interest in a possible reformation of society. At first approaching the subject through Plato's *Republic*, he soon turned to contemporary ideas of socialism as expressed by the recently formed **Fabian Society** and free lectures delivered



H. G. Wells in 1907 at the door of his house at Sandgate

at **Kelmscott House**, the home of **William Morris**. He was also among the founders of *The Science School Journal*, a school magazine that allowed him to express his views on literature and society, as well as trying his hand at fiction; a precursor to his novel *The Time Machine* was published in the journal under the title *The Chronic Argonauts*. The school year 1886–87 was the last year of his studies.

During 1888 Wells stayed in **Stoke-on-Trent**, living in **Basford**, and also at the Leopard Hotel in **Burslem**. The unique environment of **The Potteries** was certainly an inspiration. He wrote in a letter to a friend from the area that "the district made an immense impression on me." The inspiration for some of his descriptions in *The War of the Worlds* is thought to have come from his short time spent here, seeing the iron foundry furnaces burn over the city, shooting huge red light into the skies. His stay in The Potteries also resulted in the macabre short story "**The Cone**" (1895, contemporaneous with his famous *The Time Machine*), set in the north of the city.

After teaching for some time, Wells found it necessary to supplement his knowledge relating to educational principles and methodology and entered the College of Preceptors (**College of Teachers**). He later received his Licentiate and Fellowship **FCP** diplomas from the College. It was not until 1890 that Wells earned a Bachelor of Science degree in **zoology** from the **University of London External Programme**. In 1889–90 he managed to find a

post as a teacher at Henley House School, where he taught **A. A. Milne**.^{[16][17]} His first published work was a Text-book of Biology in two volumes - 1893.

Upon leaving the Normal School of Science, Wells was left without a source of income. His aunt Mary—his father's sister-in-law—invited him to stay with her for a while, which solved his immediate problem of accommodation. During his stay at his aunt's residence, he grew increasingly interested in her daughter, Isabel. He would later go on to court her.

1.3 Personal life



In the mid-1890s Wells lived at 143 Maybury Road, Woking.^[18]

In 1891, Wells married his cousin Isabel Mary Wells. The couple agreed to separate in 1894 when he fell in love with one of his students, Amy Catherine Robbins (later known as Jane), whom he married in 1895.^[19] Poor health took him to Sandgate, near **Folkestone**, where in 1901 he constructed a large family home: **Spade House**. He had two sons with Jane: **George Philip** (known as "Gip") in 1901 (died 1985) and **Frank Richard** in 1903 (died 1982).

With his wife Jane's consent, Wells had affairs with a number of women, including the American birth control activist **Margaret Sanger**, adventurer and writer **Odette Keun**, Ukrainian spy **Moura Budberg** and novelist **Elizabeth von Arnim**.^[20] In 1909 he had a daughter, **Anna-Jane**, with the writer **Amber Reeves**,^[21] whose parents, **William** and **Maud Pember Reeves**, he had met through the **Fabian Society**; and in 1914 a son, **Anthony**

West (1914–1987), by the novelist and feminist **Rebecca West**, 26 years his junior.^[22] In *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), Wells wrote: "I was never a great amorist, though I have loved several people very deeply".^[23] **David Lodge**'s novel *A Man of Parts* (2011) - a 'narrative based on factual sources' (author's note) - gives a convincing and generally sympathetic account of Wells's relations with the women mentioned above, and others.

1.4 Artist

One of the ways that Wells expressed himself was through his drawings and sketches. One common location for these was the endpapers and title pages of his own diaries, and they covered a wide variety of topics, from political commentary to his feelings toward his literary contemporaries and his current romantic interests. During his marriage to Amy Catherine, whom he nicknamed Jane, he drew a considerable number of pictures, many of them being overt comments on their marriage. During this period, he called these pictures "picshuas".^[24] These picshuas have been the topic of study by Wells scholars for many years, and in 2006 a book was published on the subject.^[25]

1.5 Writer



Statue of a The War of the Worlds tripod, erected as a tribute to H. G. Wells in the centre of the town of Woking, England

Some of his early novels, called "scientific romances", invented several themes now classic in science fiction in

such works as *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, *The War of the Worlds*, *When the Sleeper Wakes*, and *The First Men in the Moon*. He also wrote realistic novels that received critical acclaim, including *Kipps* and a critique of English culture during the Edwardian period, *Tono-Bungay*. Wells also wrote dozens of short stories and novellas, the best known of which is "The Country of the Blind" (1904).

According to James Gunn, one of Wells' major contributions to the science fiction genre was his approach, which he referred to as his "new system of ideas".^[26] In his opinion the author should always strive to make the story as credible as possible, even if both the writer and the reader knew certain elements are impossible, allowing the reader to accept the ideas as something that could really happen, today referred to as "the plausible impossible" and "suspension of disbelief". While neither invisibility or time travel were new in speculative fiction, Wells added a sense of realism to the concepts which the readers were not familiar with. In "Wells's Law", a science fiction story should contain only a single extraordinary assumption. Being aware the notion of magic as something real had disappeared from society, he therefore used scientific ideas and theories as a substitute for magic to justify the impossible. Wells's best-known statement of the "law" appears in his introduction to *The Scientific Romances of H.G. Wells* (1933),

"As soon as the magic trick has been done the whole business of the fantasy writer is to keep everything else human and real. Touches of prosaic detail are imperative and a rigorous adherence to the hypothesis. Any extra fantasy outside the cardinal assumption immediately gives a touch of irresponsible silliness to the invention."^[27]

Though *Tono-Bungay* is not a science-fiction novel, radioactive decay plays a small but consequential role in it. Radioactive decay plays a much larger role in *The World Set Free* (1914). This book contains what is surely his biggest prophetic "hit". Scientists of the day were well aware that the natural decay of radium releases energy at a slow rate over thousands of years. The rate of release is too slow to have practical utility, but the total amount released is huge. Wells's novel revolves around an (unspecified) invention that accelerates the process of radioactive decay, producing bombs that explode with no more than the force of ordinary high explosives—but which "continue to explode" for days on end. "Nothing could have been more obvious to the people of the earlier twentieth century", he wrote, "than the rapidity with which war was becoming impossible ... [but] they did not see it until the atomic bombs burst in their fumbling hands". In 1932, the physicist and conceiver of nuclear chain reaction Leó Szilárd read *The World Set Free*, a book which he said made a great impression on him.^[28]

Wells also wrote nonfiction. Wells's first nonfiction bestseller was *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* (1901). When originally serialized in a magazine it was subtitled, "An Experiment in Prophecy", and is considered his most explicitly futuristic work. It offered the immediate political message of the privileged sections of society continuing to bar capable men from other classes from advancement until war would force a need to employ those most able, rather than the traditional upper classes, as leaders. Anticipating what the world would be like in the year 2000, the book is interesting both for its hits (trains and cars resulting in the dispersion of populations from cities to suburbs; moral restrictions declining as men and women seek greater sexual freedom; the defeat of German militarism, and the existence of a European Union) and its misses (he did not expect successful aircraft before 1950, and averred that "my imagination refuses to see any sort of submarine doing anything but suffocate its crew and founder at sea").^{[29][30]}

His bestselling two-volume work, *The Outline of History* (1920), began a new era of popularised world history. It received a mixed critical response from professional historians.^[31] However, it was very popular amongst the general population and made Wells a rich man. Many other authors followed with "Outlines" of their own in other subjects. Wells reprised his *Outline* in 1922 with a much shorter popular work, *A Short History of the World*,^[32] and two long efforts, *The Science of Life* (1930) and *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1931). The "Outlines" became sufficiently common for James Thurber to parody the trend in his humorous essay, "An Outline of Scientists"—indeed, Wells's *Outline of History* remains in print with a new 2005 edition, while *A Short History of the World* has been re-edited (2006).

From quite early in his career, he sought a better way to organize society, and wrote a number of Utopian novels. The first of these was *A Modern Utopia* (1905), which shows a worldwide utopia with "no imports but meteorites, and no exports at all";^[33] two travellers from our world fall into its alternate history. The others usually begin with the world rushing to catastrophe, until people realize a better way of living: whether by mysterious gases from a comet causing people to behave rationally and abandoning a European war (*In the Days of the Comet* (1906)), or a world council of scientists taking over, as in *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933, which he later adapted for the 1936 Alexander Korda film, *Things to Come*). This depicted, all too accurately, the impending World War, with cities being destroyed by aerial bombs. He also portrayed the rise of fascist dictators in *The Autocracy of Mr Parham* (1930) and *The Holy Terror* (1939). *Men Like Gods* (1923) is also a utopian novel. Wells in this period was regarded as an enormously influential figure; the critic Malcolm Cowley stated "by the time he was forty, his influence was wider than any other living English writer".^[34]



H. G. Wells circa 1918

Wells contemplates the ideas of **nature and nurture** and questions humanity in books such as *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Not all his scientific romances ended in a Utopia, and Wells also wrote a **dystopian** novel, *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899, rewritten as *The Sleeper Awakes*, 1910), which pictures a future society where the classes have become more and more separated, leading to a revolt of the masses against the rulers. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is even darker. The narrator, having been trapped on an island of animals vivisected (unsuccessfully) into human beings, eventually returns to England; like **Gulliver** on his return from the **Houyhnhnms**, he finds himself unable to shake off the perceptions of his fellow humans as barely civilised beasts, slowly reverting to their animal natures.

Wells also wrote the preface for the first edition of **W. N. P. Barbellion's** diaries, *The Journal of a Disappointed Man*, published in 1919. Since “Barbellion” was the real author’s **pen name**, many reviewers believed Wells to have been the true author of the *Journal*; Wells always denied this, despite being full of praise for the diaries, but the rumours persisted until Barbellion’s death later that year.

In 1927 a Canadian citizen, **Florence Deeks** (1864–1959), unsuccessfully sued Wells for infringement of copyright and breach of trust, claiming that much of *The Outline of History* had been plagiarized from her unpublished manuscript,^[35] *The Web of the World's Ro-*

mance, which had spent nearly nine months in the hands of Wells’s Canadian publisher, Macmillan Canada.^[36]

In 2000, **A. B. McKillop**, a professor of history at Carleton University and a leading Canadian historian, produced a book on the Deeks versus Wells case, called *The Spinster & The Prophet: Florence Deeks, H. G. Wells, and the Mystery of the Purloined Past*.^[37] McKillop had been researching another Canadian historical figure when he came across information relating to this, and intrigued, followed through with this book. According to McKillop, the lawsuit was unsuccessful due to the prejudice against a woman suing a well-known and famous male author; McKillop paints a detailed story based on the circumstantial evidence of the case, and suggests that in a more modern court, she would have been successful.

Deeks’s manuscript was apparently sent to MacMillan and Company, UK, to check that references to other works did not violate copyright. It appeared to go through the hands of one of the editors in the UK who passed it onto Wells, as he knew Wells was thinking of a similar project. The net result was that Deeks’s eventually rejected work came back and when it was eventually opened, it was found “soiled, thumbled, worn and torn, with over a dozen pages turned down at the corners, and many others creased as if having been bent back in use”.^[38] When she compared her work to *The Outline of History* in the winter of 1920–21 she found remarkable similarities, exact text similarities, and the same errors and omissions that marred her work, also in Wells’s.

In 2004, Denis N. Magnusson, Professor Emeritus of the Faculty of Law, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, had published in *Queen’s Law Journal* an article on *Deeks v. Wells*. This re-examines the case in relation to McKillop’s book (described as “a novel” in the editorial introduction). While having some sympathy for Deeks, he “challenges the outpouring of public support” for her. He argues that she had a weak case that was not well presented, and though she may have met with **sexism** from her lawyers, she did receive a fair trial. He goes on to say that the law applied is essentially the same law that would be applied to a similar case today (i.e., 2004).^[39]

In 1933 Wells predicted in *The Shape of Things to Come* that the world war he feared would begin in January 1940,^[40] a prediction which ultimately came true four months early, in September 1939, with the outbreak of **World War II**.^[41]

In 1936, before the **Royal Institution**, Wells called for the compilation of a constantly growing and changing **World Encyclopaedia**, to be reviewed by outstanding authorities and made accessible to every human being. In 1938, he published a collection of essays on the future organisation of knowledge and education, *World Brain*, including the essay, “The Idea of a Permanent World Encyclopaedia”.

Prior to 1933, Wells’s books were widely read in Germany and Austria, and most of his science fiction works had been translated shortly after publication.^[42] By 1933

he had attracted the attention of German officials because of his criticism of the political situation in Germany, and on 10 May 1933, Wells's books were **burned by the Nazi youth** in Berlin's **Opernplatz**, and his works were banned from libraries and bookstores.^[42] Wells, as president of **PEN International** (Poets, Essayists, Novelists), angered the **Nazis** by overseeing the expulsion of the German PEN club from the international body in 1934 following the German PEN's refusal to admit non-Aryan writers to its membership. At a PEN conference in **Ragusa**, Wells refused to yield to Nazi sympathisers who demanded that the exiled author **Ernst Toller** be prevented from speaking.^[42] Near the end of the World War II, **Allied forces** discovered that the **SS** had compiled lists of people slated for immediate arrest during the invasion of Britain in the abandoned **Operation Sea Lion**, with Wells included in the alphabetical list of "**The Black Book**".^[43]

Seeking a more structured way to play war games, Wells also wrote *Floor Games* (1911) followed by *Little Wars* (1913). *Little Wars* is recognised today as the first **recreational war game** and Wells is regarded by gamers and hobbyists as "the Father of Miniature War Gaming".^[44]

1.6 Final years



H. G. Wells in 1943

Wells's literary reputation declined as he spent his later years promoting causes that were rejected by most of his contemporaries as well as by younger authors whom he had previously influenced. In this connection **George Orwell** described Wells as "too sane to understand the mod-

ern world".^[45] **G. K. Chesterton** quipped: "Mr Wells is a born storyteller who has sold his birthright for a pot of message".^[46]

Wells had **diabetes**,^[47] and was a co-founder in 1934 of The Diabetic Association (what is now **Diabetes UK**, the leading charity for people with diabetes in the UK).^[48]

On 28 October 1940, on the radio station **KTSA** in **San Antonio, Texas**, Wells took part in a radio interview with **Orson Welles**, who two years previously had performed a famous **radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds***. During the interview, by Charles C Shaw, a KTSA radio host, Wells admitted his surprise at the widespread panic that resulted from the broadcast, but acknowledged his debt to Welles for increasing sales of one of his "more obscure" titles.^[49]

Wells died of unspecified causes on 13 August 1946, aged 79, at his home at 13 Hanover Terrace, **Regent's Park**, London.^{[50][51]} Some reports also say he died of a heart attack at the flat of a friend in London. In his preface to the 1941 edition of *The War in the Air*, Wells had stated that his **epitaph** should be: "I told you so. You *damned* fools".^[52] He was cremated at **Golders Green Crematorium** on 16 August 1946, with his ashes scattered at sea near **Old Harry Rocks**.^[53] A commemorative **blue plaque** in his honour was installed at his home in **Regent's Park**.

2 Political views

Main article: [Political views of H.G. Wells](#)

2.1 The Fabian Society

Wells called his political views socialist. He was for a time a member of the socialist **Fabian Society**, but broke with them as his creative political imagination, matching the originality shown in his fiction, outran theirs.^[54] He later grew staunchly critical of them as having a poor understanding of economics and educational reform. He ran as a **Labour Party** candidate for **London University** in the 1922 and 1923 **general elections** after the death of his friend **W. H. R. Rivers**, but at that point his faith in the party was weak or uncertain.

2.2 Class

Social class was a theme in Wells's *The Time Machine* in which the Time Traveller speaks of the future world, with its two races, as having evolved from:

"the gradual widening of the present (19th century) merely temporary and social difference between the Capitalist and the Labourer. ... Even now, does not an East-end worker live

in such artificial conditions as practically to be cut off from the natural surface of the earth? Again, the exclusive tendency of richer people ... is already leading to the closing, in their interest, of considerable portions of the surface of the land. About London, for instance, perhaps half the prettier country is shut in against intrusion.^[55] "

Wells has this very same Time Traveller, reflecting his own socialist leanings, refer in a tongue-in-cheek manner to an imagined world of stark class division as "perfect" and with no social problem unsolved. His Time Traveller thus highlights how strict class division leads to the eventual downfall of the human race:

"Once, life and property must have reached almost absolute safety. The rich had been assured of his wealth and comfort, the toiler assured of his life and work. No doubt in that perfect world there had been no unemployed problem, no social question left unsolved.^[55] "

In his book *The Way the World is Going*, Wells called for a non-Marxist form of socialism that would avoid both class war and conflict between nations.^[56]

2.3 World government

Wells's most consistent political ideal was the *World State*. He stated in his autobiography that from 1900 onward he considered a World State inevitable. He envisioned the state to be a planned society that would advance science, end nationalism, and allow people to progress by merit rather than birth.

In *Anticipations* (1900) Wells envisaged that "the great urban region between Chicago and the Atlantic" will unify the English-speaking states, and this larger English-speaking unit, "a New Republic dominating the world," will by the year 2000 become the means "by which the final peace of the world may be assured forever." It will be "a new social Hercules that will strangle the serpents of war and national animosity in his cradle." Such a synthesis "of the peoples now using the English tongue, I regard not only as possible, but as a probable, thing."^[57] The New Republic "will already be consciously and pretty freely controlling the general affairs of humanity before this century closes..." Its principles and opinions "must necessarily shape and determine that still ampler future of which the coming hundred years is but the opening phase." The New Republic must ultimately become a "World-State."^[58]

Wells's 1928 book *The Open Conspiracy* argued that groups of campaigners should advocate a "world commonwealth", governed by a scientific elite, that would work to eliminate problems such as poverty and

warfare.^[59] In 1932, Wells told Young Liberals at the *University of Oxford* that progressive leaders must become liberal fascists who would "compete in their enthusiasm and self-sacrifice" against the advocates of dictatorship.^{[60][61]} In 1940, Wells published a book called *The New World Order* that outlined his plan as to how a World Government would be set up. In *The New World Order*, Wells admitted that the establishment of such a government could take a long time, and be created in a piecemeal fashion.^[62]

2.4 Eugenics

Some of Wells's early science fiction works reflect his thoughts about the degeneration of humanity.^[63] Wells doubted whether human knowledge had advanced sufficiently for eugenics to be successful. In 1904 he discussed a survey paper by Francis Galton, co-founder of eugenics, saying, "I believe that now and always the conscious selection of the best for reproduction will be impossible; that to propose it is to display a fundamental misunderstanding of what individuality implies ... It is in the sterilisation of failure, and not in the selection of successes for breeding, that the possibility of an improvement of the human stock lies". In his 1940 book *The Rights of Man: Or What Are We Fighting For?* Wells included among the human rights he believed should be available to all people, "a prohibition on mutilation, sterilization, torture, and any bodily punishment".^[64]

2.5 Race

Wells's 1906 book *The Future in America*, contains a chapter, "The Tragedy of Colour", which discusses the problems facing black Americans.^[65] While writing the book, Wells met with Booker T. Washington, who provided him with much of his information for the book.^[66] Wells praised the "heroic" resolve of black Americans, stating he doubted if the US could:

"show any thing finer than the quality of the resolve, the steadfast effort hundreds of black and coloured men are making to-day to live blamelessly, honourably, and patiently, getting for themselves what scraps of refinement, learning, and beauty they may, keeping their hold on a civilization they are grugged and denied."^[65]

In his 1916 book *What Is Coming?* Wells states, "I hate and despise a shrewish suspicion of foreigners and foreign ways; a man who can look me in the face, laugh with me, speak truth and deal fairly, is my brother, though his skin is as black as ink or as yellow as an evening primrose".^[67]

In *The Outline of History*, Wells argued against the idea of "racial purity", stating: "Mankind from the point of view

of a biologist is an animal species in a state of arrested differentiation and possible admixture. ... [A]ll races are more or less mixed".^[68]

In 1931 Wells was one of several signatories to a letter in Britain (along with 33 British MPs) protesting against the death sentence passed upon the African-American *Scottsboro Boys*.^[69]

In 1943 Wells wrote an article for the *Evening Standard*, "What a Zulu Thinks of the English", prompted by receiving a letter from a Zulu soldier, Lance Corporal Aaron Hlope.^[70] Wells's article was a strong attack on anti-black discrimination in South Africa. Wells claimed he had "the utmost contempt and indignation for the unfairness of the handicaps put upon men of colour". Wells also denounced the South African government as a "petty white tyranny".^[70]

2.6 Zionism

Wells had given some moderate, unenthusiastic support for *Territorialism* before the First World War, but later became a bitter opponent of the Zionist movement in general. He saw *Zionism* as an exclusive and separatist movement which challenged the collective solidarity he advocated in his vision of a world state. No supporter of Jewish identity in general, Wells had in his utopian writings predicted the ultimate assimilation of the *Jewish people*.^[71] In notes to accompany his biographical novel *A Man of Parts* David Lodge describes how Wells came to regret his attitudes to the Jews as he became more aware of the extent of the Nazi atrocities.^[72] This included a letter of apology written to Chaim Weizmann for earlier statements he had made.^[72]

2.7 First World War

He supported Britain in the *First World War* in his 1914 article, "Why Britain Went To War",^[73] despite his many criticisms of British policy, and opposed, in 1916, moves for an early peace.^[74] In an essay published that year he acknowledged that he could not understand those British pacifists who were reconciled to "handing over great blocks of the black and coloured races to the [German Empire] to exploit and experiment upon" and that the extent of his own pacifism depended in the first instance upon an armed peace, with "England keep[ing] to England and Germany to Germany". State boundaries would be established according to natural ethnic affinities, rather than by planners in distant imperial capitals, and overseen by his envisaged world alliance of states.^[75]

2.8 Soviet Union

The leadership of Joseph Stalin led to a change in his view of the Soviet Union even though his initial impression of

Stalin himself was mixed. He disliked what he saw as a narrow orthodoxy and intransigence in Stalin. He did give him some praise saying in an article in the left-leaning *New Statesman* magazine in 1934, "I have never met a man more fair, candid, and honest" and making it clear that he felt the "sinister" image of Stalin was unfair or false.^[76] Nevertheless, he judged Stalin's rule to be far too rigid, restrictive of independent thought, and blinkered to lead toward the Cosmopolis he hoped for.^[77] In the course of his visit to the Soviet Union in 1934, he debated the merits of *reformist* socialism over *Marxism-Leninism* with Stalin.^[78]

In 1939 Wells denounced the ideological takeover of science by fascism and communism:

"In Communist circles you may hear the most terrible balderdash about proletarian chemistry or proletarian mathematics. In Germany also it is alleged that some remarkable iniquity attaches to Jewish physics and Einstein is denounced and banned."^[79]

2.9 Other endeavours

Wells brought his interest in art and design, and politics together when he and other notables signed a memorandum to the Permanent Secretaries of the Board of Trade, among others. The November 1914 memorandum expressed the signatories concerns about British industrial design in the face of foreign competition. The suggestions were accepted, leading to the foundation of the *Design and Industries Association*.^[80] In the 1920s he was an enthusiastic supporter of rejuvenation attempts by Eugen Steinach and others. He was a patient of Dr Norman Haire (perhaps a rejuvenated one) and in response to Haire's 1924 book *Rejuvenation: the Work of Steinach, Voronoff, and Others*,^[81] Wells prophesied a more mature, graver society with "active and hopeful children" and adults "full of years" where none will be "aged".^[82]

In his later political writing, Wells incorporated into his discussions of the World State a notion of universal human rights that would protect and guarantee the freedom of the individual. His 1940 publication *The Rights of Man* laid the groundwork for the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.^[83]

2.10 Summary

In the end Wells's contemporary political impact was limited, excluding his fiction's positivist stance on the leaps that could be made by *physics* towards world peace. His efforts regarding the *League of Nations* became a disappointment as the organization turned out to be a weak one unable to prevent the Second World War, which itself occurred towards the very end of his life and only increased the pessimistic side of his nature. In his last book *Mind*

at the *End of Its Tether* (1945) he considered the idea that humanity being replaced by another species might not be a bad idea. He also came to refer to the Second World War era as “The Age of Frustration”.

3 Religious views

Wells wrote in his book *God the Invisible King* (1917) that his idea of God did not draw upon the traditional religions of the world:

“This book sets out as forcibly and exactly as possible the religious belief of the writer. [Which] is a profound belief in a personal and intimate God. ... Putting the leading idea of this book very roughly, these two antagonistic typical conceptions of God may be best contrasted by speaking of one of them as God-as-Nature or the Creator, and of the other as God-as-Christ or the Redeemer. One is the great Outward God; the other is the Inmost God. The first idea was perhaps developed most highly and completely in the God of Spinoza. It is a conception of God tending to pantheism, to an idea of a comprehensive God as ruling with justice rather than affection, to a conception of aloofness and awe-striking worshipfulness. The second idea, which is opposed to this idea of an absolute God, is the God of the human heart. The writer would suggest that the great outline of the theological struggles of that phase of civilisation and world unity which produced Christianity, was a persistent but unsuccessful attempt to get these two different ideas of God into one focus.”^[84]

Later in the work he aligns himself with a “renascent or modern religion ... neither atheist nor Buddhist nor Mohammedan nor Christian ... [that] he has found growing up in himself”.^[85]

Of Christianity he has this to say: “it is not now true for me. ... Every believing Christian is, I am sure, my spiritual brother ... but if systemically I called myself a Christian I feel that to most men I should imply too much and so tell a lie”. Of other world religions he writes: “All these religions are true for me as Canterbury Cathedral is a true thing and as a Swiss chalet is a true thing. There they are, and they have served a purpose, they have worked. Only they are not true for me to live in them. ... They do not work for me”.^[86]

4 Literary influence

The science fiction historian John Clute describes Wells as “the most important writer the genre has yet seen”, and



H. G. WELLS

H. G. Wells as depicted in Gernsback's Science Wonder Stories in 1929



Wells's works were reprinted in American science fiction magazines as late as the 1950s

notes his work has been central to both British and American science fiction.^[87] He was nominated for the Nobel

Prize in Literature in 1921, 1932, 1935, and 1946.^[7]

In Britain, Wells's work was a key model for the British "Scientific Romance", and other writers in that mode, such as Olaf Stapledon,^[88] J. D. Beresford,^[89] S. Fowler Wright,^[90] and Naomi Mitchison,^[91] all drew on Wells's example. Wells was also an important influence on British science fiction of the period after the Second World War, with Arthur C. Clarke^[92] and Brian Aldiss^[93] expressing strong admiration for Wells's work.

In the United States, Hugo Gernsback reprinted most of Wells's work in the pulp magazine *Amazing Stories*, regarding Wells's work as "texts of central importance to the self-conscious new genre".^[87] Later American writers such as Ray Bradbury,^[94] Isaac Asimov,^[95] Frank Herbert^[96] and Ursula K. Le Guin^[97] all recalled being influenced by Wells's work.

Wells also inspired writers of European speculative fiction such as Karel Čapek^[97] and Yevgeny Zamyatin.^[97]

5 Representations

5.1 Literary

- The superhuman protagonist of J. D. Beresford's 1911 novel, *The Hampdenshire Wonder*, Victor Stott, was based on Wells.^[89]
- In M. P. Shiel's short story "The Primate of the Rose" (1928), there is an unpleasant womanizer named E. P. Crooks, who was written as a parody of Wells.^[98] Wells had attacked Shiel's *Prince Zaleski* when it was published in 1895, and this was Shiel's response.^[98] Wells would later praise Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* (1901); in turn Shiel expressed admiration for Wells, referring to him at a speech to the Horsham Rotary Club in 1933 as "my friend Mr. Wells".^[98]
- In C. S. Lewis' novel *That Hideous Strength* (1945), the character Jules is a caricature of Wells,^[99] and much of Lewis's science fiction was written both under the influence of Wells and as an antithesis to his work (or, as he put it, an "exorcism"^[100] of the influence it had on him).
- In Saul Bellow's novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), Wells is one of several historical figures the protagonist met when he was a young man.^[101]
- In Brian Aldiss' novella *The Saliva Tree*, Wells has a small off screen guest role.^[102]

5.2 Dramatic

- Malcolm MacDowell portrays Wells in the 1979 science fiction film *Time After Time*, in which Wells

uses a time machine to pursue Jack the Ripper to the present day. In the film, Wells meets "Amy" in the future who then returns to 1895 to become his second wife Amy Catherine Robbins.

- Wells is portrayed in the 1985 story *Timelash* from the 22nd season of the BBC science-fiction television series *Doctor Who*. In this story, Herbert, an enthusiastic temporary companion to the Doctor, is revealed to be a young H. G. Wells. The plot is loosely based upon the themes and characters of *The Time Machine* with references to *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. The story jokingly suggests that Wells's inspiration for his later novels came from his adventure with the Sixth Doctor.
- In the BBC2 anthology series *Encounters*, about imagined meetings between historical figures, *Beautiful Lies* (15 August 1992) centred on an acrimonious dinner party attended by Wells (Richard Todd), George Orwell (Jon Finch), and William Empson (Patrick Ryecart).
- The character of Wells also appeared in several episodes of *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993–1997), usually pitted against the time-traveling villain known as Tempus (Lane Davies). Wells's younger self was played by Terry Kiser, and the older Wells was played by Hamilton Camp.
- In the 2006 television docudrama *HG Wells: War with the World*, Wells is played by Michael Sheen.
- On the science fiction television series *Warehouse 13* (2009–2014), there is a female version Helena G. Wells. When she appeared she explained that her brother was her front for her writing because a female science fiction author would not be accepted.
- Comedian Paul F. Tompkins portrays a fictional Wells as the host of *The Dead Authors Podcast*, wherein Wells uses his time machine to bring dead authors (played by other comedians) to the present and interview them.
- H.G. Wells as a young boy appears in the *Legends of Tomorrow* episode "The Magnificent Eight". In this story, the boy Wells is dying of consumption, but is cured by a time-travelling Martin Stein.

6 Literary papers

In 1954, the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign purchased the H. G Wells literary papers and correspondence collection.^[103] The University's Rare Book & Manuscript Library holds the largest collection of Wells

manuscripts, correspondence, first editions and publications in the United States.^[104] Among these is an unpublished material and the manuscripts of such works as *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*. The collection includes first editions, revisions, translations. The letters contain general family correspondence, communications, from publishers, material regarding the Fabian Society, and letters from politicians and public figures, most notably **George Bernard Shaw** and **Joseph Conrad**.^[103]

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Main article: **H. G. Wells bibliography**

8 Notes

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11 External links

- H. G. Wells at DMOZ
- H. G. Wells at the Internet Movie Database

Sources—collections

- H. G. Wells papers at University of Illinois
- Works by H. G. Wells at Project Gutenberg
- Works by H. G. Wells at Project Gutenberg Canada
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